

# Trails to be linked, without tax dollars

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By Chad Selweski, Macomb Daily Staff Writer

After several years of effort, Macomb County officials appear on the verge of piecing together a 70-mile hike/bike path that could attract cycling enthusiasts from across Michigan.

The circular loop will connect with the Metropolitan Parkway path and the new Macomb Orchard Trail in north Macomb, which means it will span the area from Lake St. Clair to Richmond and Romeo, south to Sterling Heights and east to the lake again at the Metro Beach Metropark in Harrison Township.

The ambitious \$34 million plan would be funded by grants, allocations from foundations and donations from outdoor enthusiast groups. No new taxes are planned.

Officials hope that the bike path will attract weekend tourists to Macomb County, with out-of-town cyclists staying in hotels along the

route. County Commissioners Ed Bruley and Jim Carabelli have played a lead role on the bipartisan project and believe the county is on the verge of a breakthrough.

"This is an integral part in making Macomb County a weekend destination," said Bruley, a Clinton Township Democrat. "This trail will be rural, urban, suburban and aquatic. To our knowledge, there is no other trail in Michigan that has all of these features."

The bike path will connect several parks along the way — Metro Beach, Stony Creek Metropark in Washington Township, Riverbends Park in Shelby Township, and Dodge Park and Freedom Hill County Park, both in Sterling Heights.

At Metro Beach, trail users can take a break and enjoy a dip in Lake St. Clair. Stony Creek also offers swimming and other diversions. A section through the Selfridge Air National Guard Base in Harrison Township will offer a view of the lakeshore that the public has never seen.

The breakthrough in completing the loop— at least on the county's drawing board — came when military officials all the way up the chain of command, in the Air National Guard and Air Force, recently granted tentative approval for the construction of a bike path on the 2.5 miles of Selfridge shoreline.

With Sen. Carl Levin, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, leading the way, the details have yet to be worked out. But a Selfridge base engineer, Lt. Col. Stephen Ward, has been designated to negotiate a land lease

with the county.

In the past, officials hoped for a 200-foot-wide swath of property to create a park-like setting along the Selfridge waterfront. It's assumed that a security fence will be constructed to separate the base property from the bike path.

"Initial mentions of the bike path project (in 2007) did stir up a lot of questions as far as responsibilities associated with such a recreational path adjacent to our military missions (and) maintaining our security posture," said Capt. Penelope Carroll, a base spokeswoman.

"(Base Commander) Gen. Michael Peplinski has maintained a positive attitude toward the bike path project, as long as it doesn't impede our security or our missions."

An advisory committee comprised of 15 local cycling enthusiasts has met for about a year, trying to hammer out the details, especially bringing all the local communities on board as committed partners.

"Right now, a group of us go out to Rochester to ride. So, we go out-of-county and spend our money," said Tim Focht, owner of Tim's Bike Shop in St. Clair Shores and a committee member. "More and more people are getting into cycling. And this (trail loop) will give people a place to ride in Macomb County."

If funding goes well, the 70-mile loop could become a reality in two years. So far, 44 miles of the envisioned bike path have been completed. Most of the Macomb Orchard Trail consists of asphalt but a section west of Armada still needs a second application of crushed stone.

The county Planning and Economic Development Department will handle the planning for the trail loop and the Road Commission will oversee the construction.

In addition to the parks along the way, the trail already offers rural scenery and a trip through the quaint downtown areas of Romeo, Armada and Richmond.

A May 22 event on the trail will serve as an official kickoff of the summer cycling season. This "Trail Day" gathering, at 25 Mile Road and Shelby Road in Shelby Township, will offer free bike inspections, a food court, information booths and a fun run/walk.

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